

WASHINGTON, D.C. Today, Congressman Sanford D. Bishop, Jr., a Member of the House Appropriations Committee, announced that the full House of Representatives passed the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act by a vote of 218 to 212. Congressman Bishop voted for the bill.

"Today is an historic day and I am proud to have played a role in passing this important legislation to change direction in Iraq and protect our troops. With this bill, our troops will finally be equipped to do their jobs, complete their mission and return home," commented Bishop. "This is not a timeline on our troops; instead, it is a timeline on the Iraqis to come together and take control of their country. Until now, they've been unable or unwilling to put aside their sectarian differences to unify and bring an end to the violence and killing. It is our hope that this bill will give them more impetus to do just that."

The bulk of the \$124 billion emergency spending bill will provide our troops with the proper training and equipment they need to fight the ongoing efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the proper guidelines for rest and recuperation between deployments and establish a date for redeployment from Iraq. Additionally, the bill puts a priority on caring for our men and women in uniform by boosting spending for Defense Health and Veterans Health care. Among other things, this money is intended to begin to fix the problems within the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the Veterans Health Care System.

Also added into the bill is emergency funding for several domestic programs, including \$750 million for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Georgia will receive \$131 million of the SCHIP funds in order to fix PeachCare for Kids, a program in such dire straits it stopped accepting enrollees on March 11.

"I am very pleased my colleagues approved emergency funding for the SCHIP program. Next to the war in Iraq, this is one of the most important issues on the minds of my constituents and many Georgians."

The bill also includes a provision, inserted by Congressman Bishop, that provides \$74 million for the payment of peanut storage and handling fees. These provisions will keep peanut farmers from having to suddenly absorb the additional costs imposed upon them by the expiration similar provisions in Farm bill last year. In 2006, the language was proposed by Bishop along with Congressman Jack Kingston (R-GA). However, the Republican Congress failed to pass 9 of 11 Congressional spending bills, including the Agricultural Appropriations bill.

"My colleagues and I have heard from farmers from across the country in drastic need of this long-standing program because it allows them to survive. The failure to secure the funding in 2006 has put the peanut industry at risk," said Bishop. "In light of those circumstances, I am very pleased to have been able to play a part in securing this funding and help keep afloat not only Southwest Georgia's economy, but also other states where the peanut industry plays a vital role."

Other emergency provisions included in the bill provide funding for much needed Gulf Coast Recovery for those affected by Hurricane Katrina, soldiers suffering from Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder and traumatic brain injuries, agricultural disaster assistance and low-income home energy assistance.

Now that the FY 07 Supplemental Appropriations bill has passed the House of Representatives, it heads to the Senate for consideration.

The following is a more detailed breakdown of the provisions contained within the bill:

The U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act fully supports our troops and our veterans by containing more funding for them than the President requested. This includes:

Defense Health Care -- \$1.7 billion above the President's Request

- * \$450 million for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/Counseling
- * \$450 million for Traumatic Brain Injury care and research
- * \$730 million to prevent health care fee increases for our troops
- * \$20 million to address the problems at Walter Reed
- * \$14.8 million for burn care

Veteran's Health Care -- \$1.7 Billion more than the President's Request

- * \$550 million to address the backlog in maintaining VA health care facilities – intended to prevent the VA from experiencing a situation similar to that found at Walter Reed
- * \$250 million for medical administration to ensure there are sufficient personnel to support the growing number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and to maintain a high level of services for all veterans
- * \$229 million for treating the growing number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans
- * \$100 million for contract mental health care – with this funding allowing the VA to contract with private mental health care providers to ensure that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are seen in the most timely and least disruptive fashion, including members of the Guard and Reserve
- * \$62 million to speed up the processing of claims of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan

Addressing the Readiness Crisis & Other Steps to Support Our Troops

- * \$2.5 billion more to address the current readiness crisis of our stateside troops, including ensuring that they are better equipped and trained
- * \$1.4 billion more for military housing allowances
- * \$311 million more for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles for troops in Iraq
- * \$222 million more for infrared countermeasures for Air Force aircraft to address the growing threat against U.S. air operations in Iraq and Afghanistan

Meeting Benchmarks and Ending our Involvement in Iraq's Civil War. The proposal would pressure the Iraqi leaders to improve their performance by establishing a timeline for ending U.S. participation in Iraq's civil war.

- * Progressing Toward Political and Military Benchmarks. By July 1, 2007, the President must certify that Iraq is making meaningful and substantial progress in meeting political and military

benchmarks, including a militia disarmament program and a plan that equitably shares oil revenues among all Iraqis. If the President does not provide this certification then U.S. forces must begin an immediate redeployment to be completed no later than December 2007 (180 days).

* Achieving Political and Military Benchmarks. By October 1, 2007, the President must certify that Iraqis have achieved the political and military benchmarks. If he does not provide this certification then U.S. forces must begin an immediate redeployment to be completed by March 2008 (180 days).

* Ending U.S. Participation in the War. Should both certifications be provided, the Administration must begin redeploying U.S. forces from Iraq by March 1, 2008 and complete the redeployment by August 2008 (180 days).

State Children's Health Insurance Program: The proposal adds \$750 million for SCHIP to ensure continued health care coverage for children in 14 states that face a budget shortfall in the program. This includes \$131 to shore up Georgia's PeachCare for Kids.

Agricultural Assistance: Adds \$3.7 billion, largely for a scaled down agriculture disaster program that would only assist those farmers who have met their responsibility to purchase crop insurance. However, this also includes the \$74 million for peanut handling and storage fees.

FEMA Disaster Relief Fund: Adds \$910 million to the request to cover the cost of waiving Stafford Act state and local government matching fund requirements for some FEMA disaster assistance programs already provided in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

Agriculture Disaster: Includes \$140 million for farmers and ranchers affected by the hurricanes.

Loan Forgiveness: Eliminates special rules that prohibit loan forgiveness for Katrina and Rita related Community Disaster Loans.

Continued Assistance: Extends FEMA's ability to pay utility costs through February 7, 2008; extends the availability of previously appropriated Title XX Social Services Block Grant funds through September 30, 2008; extends the Secretary of Education's authority to waive certain regulations for emergency assistance to reopen schools in hurricane-impacted school districts for another year; and extends the Disaster Voucher Program, which provides Section 8 vouchers to low-income residents who moved to other parts of the country, to December 31, 2007.

Additional Assistance: \$120 million for disaster relief for fishing industries on the Louisiana Gulf Coast, \$30 million for colleges and universities and \$30 million for schools most severely impacted by the hurricanes to help them recover to normal operations, and \$25.1 million to allow the Small Business Administration Disaster Loan Program to continue to make and service disaster loans to homeowners and businesses, including those affected by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program: Adds \$400 million to partially restore cuts to the program. Many states are running out of LIHEAP funds just as many utility shut-off moratoriums are set to expire.